

A Newly Discovered Poem by Erasmus

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A previously unknown poem by Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) has come to light in Cambridge University Library's copy of the first collected edition of his epigrams. The book in which it was found was printed not as a separate work, but as the third part of a collection superintended by Erasmus and mainly consisting of the writings of Thomas More. For the chief item in it was More's *Utopia*, supplemented first by More's epigrams, and then by those of Erasmus. The volume is therefore catalogued at Cambridge as *De optimo reip. statu, deque noua insula Vtopia* (Basel: Froben, March 1518; classmark Rel.c.51.3). It is continuously paginated, and in the final section an early Tudor hand has copied into the margins three poems, all of them expressly ascribed to Erasmus. The first of them, described as an epitaph on King Henry VII (and inserted on page 319), has hitherto been unknown to modern scholars. The other two poems (inserted on page 355) both relate to Henry VIII's meeting with the Emperor Charles V at Calais in July 1520.¹ These verses are also of considerable scholarly interest, as they are versions of the last two unknown poems by Erasmus to be discovered, in the early 1880s, in a manuscript now in the Bibliotheek Rotterdam.² The Cambridge text was only the second exemplar of these poems to be identified, and offers some variant readings, one or two of them evidently superior. Moreover, in the course of research for this article, two further exemplars of the Calais poems have also been identified. One is in among the Ashmole manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, and the other among the collections of the College of Arms.³

¹ Cambridge University Library also has three copies of Froben's November-December 1518 printing of this collection: F 151.d.3.4; S61:29.d.5.180, which lacks the first title page; and Peterborough G.2.8, which lacks *Utopia*). None of them has the additional verses inserted.

² See *The Poems of Desiderius Erasmus*, ed. C. Reedijk (Leiden: Brill, 1956) [henceforth cited as Reedijk], nos. 109-110, pp. 329-30. These poems are edited and translated into English in Erasmus, *Poems*, tr. Clarence H. Miller, ed. H. Vredeveld (2 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. Collected Works of Erasmus, 85-86; henceforth cited as M-V and by the number of the poem), nos. 122-23, pp. 344-47.

³ Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 1116 includes a transcript by Elias Ashmole, among his voluminous compilations relating to heraldry, ceremonial, and the Order of the Garter, of an

I. The Calais Poems: text and observations on metre

Erasmus de concordia Caroli et Henrici regis Anglorum Calisi Facta anno domini 1520.

Mensis iulii die⁴

Sidera si quando in celis coiere benigna

Id maximo fit gentis humane bono

Nunc quia summorum duo candida pectora⁵ regum

Tam⁶ rarus ecce in terris iunxit⁷ amor

Nam leniora⁸ sibi promittit commoda mundus

eye-witness account of Henry VIII's summit meetings with Charles V and Francis I in summer 1520. It begins on fol. 100r with the meeting of Henry and Charles at Canterbury; proceeds to the meeting between Henry and Francis (fols. 100v-103r); and ends with the second meeting between Henry and Charles, at Calais (103r-105r). It was evidently copied from some source at the College of Arms (Ashmole was Windsor Herald from 1660), and this led to a search of the College's manuscripts. A further exemplar of the poems was found in College of Arms MS M6bis, but this cannot have been Ashmole's source, as his text of one of the poems is considerably superior. The source was probably a copy of the Calais poems which was still at his residence in the Middle Temple when it was destroyed by fire on 26 Jan. 1679. See Michael Hunter on Elias Ashmole in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthews and B. Harrison (61 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol. 2, p. 661-65.

⁴ The conference at Calais was in July. It looks as though the copyist meant to give the day as well (the conference lasted 10-14 July), but no date is given, and there is no reason to believe that any marginal information has been lost on this page. The title in the Codex Horawitzianus is 'Erasmus de concordia Caroli imperatoris et Henrici regis Angliae et Franciae' (M-V 122). The title is given in Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 1116, fol. 104r, as 'De concordia Charoli Imperatoris & Henrici Angliae regis'.

⁵ Ashmole 1116: 'duo pectora candida'

⁶ Reedijk: 'Iam'; corrected by M-V. Harry Vredeveld offered some telling criticisms of Reedijk's editorial practice and errors in 'Towards a Definitive Edition of Erasmus' Poetry', *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 37 (1988), pp. 115-74. For comment on this poem, see pp. 170-71.

⁷ This line does not scan, and is doubtless a corruption of the reading found in M-V 122, College of Arms M6bis, and Ashmole 1116: 'Tam rarus ecce iunxit in terris amor'.

Henricum ubi vidit⁹ federatum Carolo
 Quam si uel Veneri solem se iungere uel si
 Soli benignum cernat adiunctum Iouem.¹⁰

In substructionem Calisiensem¹¹

Miraris hospes vnde hec moles¹² noua
 Templum est dicatum regie concordie¹³
 Quod hunc in vsum¹⁴ condidere gratie.¹⁵

Observations on metre

The first poem alternates dactylic hexameters with iambic trimeters. This arrangement, sometimes called the ‘second pythiambic’, is very rare metre in antiquity: it is found once, in

⁸ The word ‘leniora’ is given very clearly in this version, but does not scan, and is evidently a corruption of the ‘leviora’ (or ‘leuiora’) found in M-V 122 (‘Haud leviora’), Ashmole 1116 (‘Haud leuiora’), and College of Arms M6bis (which could be either).

⁹ M-V 122, College of Arms M6bis, and Ashmole 1116: ‘videt’ (which metre requires).

¹⁰ Reedijk: ‘Solem benigno cernat adiunctum Iouem’. M-V 122: ‘Solem benigno cernat adiunctum Iovi’. But the note in M-V observes ‘The manuscript reads *Iovem*’. College of Arms M6bis and Ashmole 1116 agree with the Cambridge version, which here is evidently the better reading, though on the whole Ashmole 1116 agrees with Horawitzianus against Cambridge.

¹¹ M-V 123: ‘Idem in substructionem Caletensem’. Ashmole 1116 omits the ‘r’ by scribal error, reading ‘In substuccionem Calesiensem’. College of Arms M6bis reads, erroneously, ‘In subiectionem calesiensem’, suggesting that the scribe boggled at the unusual word and transmuted it into something more familiar. This shows that Ashmole was not in fact copying from M6bis (as does the fact that M6bis, uniquely, does not present the Calais poems one after the other).

¹² M-V 123 and Ashmole 1116: ‘unde moles haec’ (which metre requires). College of Arms M6bis: ‘Inde moles haec’.

¹³ College of Arms M6bis: ‘cocordie’, presumably omitting the ‘n’ sign by accident.

¹⁴ College of Arms M6bis: ‘ullum’.

¹⁵ College of Arms M6bis: ‘graeue’. This scribe clearly struggled with this one.

Horace's *Epodes* (16),¹⁶ where the iambic trimeter is pure (i.e. it does not allow the substitution of longs for shorts in the first syllable of each metron, as Erasmus does here). It is therefore striking that one other poem by Erasmus (M-V 4), which concerns the praise of Britain, Henry VII and his children, is composed in this metre (again not with pure iambic trimeters). This adds further support to Erasmus' being the composer of these verses.

The second poem is merely three iambic trimeters (again not pure). That the poem is so short in this metre is odd, although again Erasmus' published poems parallel this form of composition, some iambic poems being of merely four lines, and one (M-V 34) a mere couplet. The choice of three lines is nevertheless odd as a number, and may suggest that its purpose was merely as a mural inscription, with no thought of its being put in print.

II. The Calais Poems: historical context

Reedijk could not ascertain what the 'substructio' might have been, nor did Vredeveld offer any view on this.¹⁷ But the discovery of two further exemplars of these two poems (albeit not credited to Erasmus), one preserved among Ashmole's transcripts, and the other in the collections of the College of Arms, makes the answer clear. Both these sources present the poems as part of fuller accounts of the meeting between Henry VIII and Charles V at Calais. The Ashmole transcript presents the Calais poems in their original context among the textual elements of the decorative scheme for an enormous temporary building that was erected in Calais under the supervision of Sir Edward Belknap as the venue for the conference banquet.¹⁸ Described as 'the bankett house' or 'the rownd howse', it was adorned with 'posies and writings' to mark the occasion. Erasmus's verses were the 'posies' (the word, derived from 'poesy', was at that time used exclusively in this sense), and in the Ashmole manuscript they are followed by three lists of Latin proverbs, mottoes, and captions (the 'writings').¹⁹

¹⁶ It may well be significant that Horace's 16th *Epode* begins with a lament for Rome as she suffers from civil war.

¹⁷ Reedijk, *Epigrams*, p. 330.

¹⁸ For Belknap's role, see *Rutland Papers: original documents illustrative of the courts and times of Henry VII and Henry VIII*, ed. W. Jerdan (London: Camden Society, 1842. Camden Society orig. ser. 21), p. 55.

¹⁹ Ashmole 1116, fols. 103v-105r. Erasmus's poems are on fols. 103v-104r.

The fullest study of this monument of boards and canvas, in form and scale something like a modern circus tent, and akin to the sort of things put up at the Field of Cloth of Gold, is found in a recent study by Charles Giry-Deloison.²⁰ It was an elaborate pavilion with a painted ceiling and internal galleries on three levels from which viewers could look down on proceedings below. The ‘substructionem’ was either the more solid ground level of the building or else, perhaps, the lobby or vestibule through which it was entered. The mottoes on the theme of friendship seem to have been painted on various levels of the building. The first list comprises mottoes that, like the shorter of Erasmus’s poems, seem to have decorated the ‘substructionem’. Two further lists appear under the headings ‘The lowest storie’ and ‘The second storie’ – presumably corresponding to a couple of the galleries. The third list changes character towards its end, as mottoes on friendship give way to what are evidently captions for the painted scene decorating the inside of the canvas roof: this depicted ‘the heavens, with stars, sunne, moone, and clouds, with divers other things made above over men’s heads’.²¹ By one of those meteorological freaks characteristic of the Channel, the winds were so severe that the roof was nearly torn off, and the banquet had to be held in a more solid venue next door.²² What is not clear is why Erasmus’s poems came to figure in the decorative scheme for the banqueting house. It is unlikely that they were commissioned during the preparations for

²⁰ C. Giry-Deloison, ‘Le premier ouvrage imprimé à Arras? Jean [de] Buyens et l’entrevue de Charles Quint et d’Henri VIII à Calais en juillet 1520’, in *Monarchies, noblesses et diplomaties européennes: mélanges en l’honneur de Jean-François Labourdette*, ed. J.-P. Poussou, R. Baury and M.-C. Vignal-Souleyrou (Paris: PUPS, 2005), pp. 167-202. For the banqueting house, see pp. 180-85 (with the comparison to a circus tent at p. 181). Giry-Deloison helpfully reproduces the text of the very rare contemporary printed account of the meeting at Calais (edited at pp. 187-96), and goes beyond the earlier but also illuminating analysis offered by Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 158-64 and 168. Giry-Deloison also edits the ‘posies and writinges’ from Ashmole 1116, pp. 196-98, printing the two Calais poems on p. 197, but without noticing that they are elsewhere attributed to Erasmus.

²¹ They are edited by Giry-Deloison, ‘Premier ouvrage’, pp. 196-98.

²² Glenn Richardson, *The Field of Cloth of Gold* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 182-83; Giry-Deloison, ‘Premier ouvrage’, p. 180. For an early account of the ‘banqueting house’ and its decorative scheme, and of the wind that ripped it all apart, see John Stow, *The Annales of England* (London: Ralfe Newbery, 1601), p. 857.

the conference, because Erasmus was at that time travelling in the entourage of Charles V. However, he came to Calais with the emperor, and it is entirely possible that the verses were composed by him as his contribution to the solemn festivities.

The Calais poems have been known since 1882, when Adalbert Horawitz discovered them in a sixteenth-century manuscript, now known as the Codex Horawitzianus, that was associated with Martin Lipsius, an Augustinian canon of Louvain, a friend and collaborator of Erasmus, and a capable humanist in his own right.²³ The fact that the two poems are found together in three of the manuscripts from which they are now known (and not far apart from each other in the fourth) indicates that they travelled together as a pair. It is barely imaginable that the English copyist could have had access to the Codex Horawitzianus, and in any case his readings are different enough to indicate that he was working from an independent source. Nor is it likely that he was working from the description of the Calais meeting that Elias Ashmole later transcribed, as in that latter source the poems are not ascribed to Erasmus. His source was probably a member of Henry's entourage at Calais. Thomas More, for example, was with the Court on that trip, as were several other friends and connections of Erasmus's.²⁴ After the conference, More travelled with Erasmus from Calais to Bruges before he returned

²³ A. Horawitz, *Erasmus von Rotterdam und Martinus Lipsius* (Vienna, 1882), p. 30.

Horawitz discusses the manuscript at pp. 3-4. This MS is still in the Rotterdam Public Library, classmark Erasmuszaal 15.C.4 (*ex inf.* Dr Adrie van der Laan, Curator of the Rare Books Reading Room at the Bibliotheek Rotterdam). See *The Poems of Desiderius Erasmus*, ed. C. Reedijk (Leiden: Brill, 1956), pp. 329-30.

²⁴ See *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J.S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R.H. Brodie (21 vols. London, 1862-1932), vol. 3, part 1, no. 906, for a list of lords attending on the king at Gravelines, 10 July 1520. It includes Wolsey, Warham, Nicholas West (Bishop of Ely), 'the Chief Secretary' (Richard Pace), John Stokesley, the Dean of Chapel, and the Almoner. John Fisher (the Bishop of Rochester and Chancellor of the University of Cambridge) had been in the royal entourage for the Field of Cloth of Gold, but there is no evidence that he was present at the later and less grandiose conference with the Emperor at Calais. Lord Mountjoy was also in the entourage for the French summit, but, like Fisher, is not mentioned among those at Calais. They were both among those listed as attending upon Catherine of Aragon. See also *Letters and Papers*, vol. 3, part 1, no. 704, papers relating to attendance at the Field of Cloth of Gold, pp. 238-46, at p. 245.

to England, so it is very likely indeed that these two epigrams came back to England with him. They could easily have spread from his household. However, there were many others who could have brought Erasmus's verses home with them. If nothing else, the discovery of a three new exemplars of the Calais epigrams shows that they were circulating despite not being published in print.

III. The 'Epitaph' on Henry VII

The most interesting of the three poems found in the Cambridge *Utopia*, however, is that which is described as an epitaph on Henry VII. It is not to be found in the critical and collected editions of Erasmus's poems, neither in that published by Cornelis Reedijk in 1956, nor in the edition by Harry Vredeveld (with English translations by Clarence Miller) that appeared in 1993.²⁵ There is no mention of such an epitaph in the standard biographies of Henry VII, nor in the scholarship on Henry's tomb in Westminster Abbey (which features another Latin epitaph, now attributed to John Skelton).²⁶ The authenticity of this newly discovered poem might be considered doubtful were it not for its association with the two Calais verses which have just been discussed. Whoever inserted these three texts into his copy of Erasmus's epigrams not only had an obvious interest in Erasmus but also had access to genuine unpublished work by the great man. His inclusion of a pair of poems whose

²⁵ *The Poems of Desiderius Erasmus*, ed. C. Reedijk (Leiden: Brill, 1956). Erasmus, *Poems*, tr. Clarence H. Miller, ed. H. Vredeveld (2 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. Collected Works of Erasmus, 85-86).

²⁶ See e.g. S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972); Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Thomas Penn, *The Winter King* (London: Allen Lane, 2011). Erasmus himself was commissioned to provide the inscription that was carved on the similar tomb prepared for Lady Margaret Beaufort (the king's mother) that stands near Henry VII's in the Lady Chapel there. See Philip Lindley, 'The singular mediacions and praiers of al the holie companie of Heven: sculptural functions and forms in Henry VII's chapel', in *Westminster Abbey: the Lady Chapel of Henry VII*, ed. T. Tatton-Brown & R. Mortimer (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), pp.259-93, at 271; in turn citing *The Latin Writings of John Skelton*, ed. David R. Carlson, *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991), pp. 1-125 (texts at pp. 59-60, comment at pp. 115-21). See also M. K. Jones & M. G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 238.

authenticity is independently attested by an impeccable source gives us every reason for confidence in the authenticity of the third poem added in his hand.

IV. The ‘Epitaph’ on Henry VII: text and observations on metre

Epitaphium Henrici regis Anglie, eius nominis septimi: omnium absque controuersia sui saeculi regum: potentissimi, sapientissimi, atque etiam optimi per Desiderium Erasum.

Mortem, Henrice, tuam quid est quod²⁷ Anglus
luxit nemo?²⁸ Nec est repertus usquam
huc te qui cuperet renavigare?²⁹
Nil mirum est, neque grex licentiosus
sive osor ferulae atque disciplinae 5
doctorem flet abire diligentem,
et ne quando redire possit optat.
Verum³⁰ his longa dies magistra ferre
et serum et sterilem solet dolorem.
Illum illum rigidum gravemque, vota 10

²⁷ The phrase *quid est quod* may seem a little prosaic in tone, and it is not found in Classical Latin poetry after the early comic writers Plautus and Terence. Nevertheless, it is a feature of Catullian style to reappropriate quotidian expressions into his colloquial style of versification: cf. 1.8-9 *quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli, | quaecumque quidem est*. The phrase *quid est quod* occurs twice in a poem of Erasmus written in 1510-11: M-V 43, vv. 44 and 62.

²⁸ The scansion of *nemo* and *quando* (v.7) with a short final -o is paralleled in Erasmus’ poetry: cf. *nemo* (66.4, 112.324) and *quando* (2.54, 58.2, 6, 7).

²⁹ The text suggests (introduced by *aliter*) *rursus redire* as a variant, which is on a par in syntactical and metrical terms, and indeed more natural in the sense of ‘return [from death]’. The fact that two versions are known either suggests wider circulation of the epitaph (thus allowing for the introduction of a corruption) or Erasmus’ own editorial vacillation in the manuscript original (which, given the scale of the corruption required, may be the more likely alternative). While *renavigare* (‘to sail back’) may seem an ill-chosen verb for returning to life, it may be an allusion to Henry VII’s earlier and victorious return by ship in 1485.

³⁰ This replaces the deleted ‘Serum’, presumably written through false anticipation of ‘serum’ in the next line.

olim publica septimum requirunt.

Why is it that no Englishman mourned³¹ your death, Henry? And why was no one to be found anywhere who wanted you to sail back? No wonder: neither a licentious crowd nor a hater of the whip and discipline laments the departure of the diligent doctor, and they hope that he will never more be able to return. But length of days, their teacher, tends to bring a late and barren pain. Public prayers will one day call for him, him the stern, the grave, the seventh.³²

Observations on metre

The metre deployed, the Phaelaecian hendecasyllable, was popularised in Latin by Catullus, despite its Greek origins. Although it was deployed for poems of various genres, it became primarily associated with poems of a more trivial or playful nature: it is therefore, *prima facie*, an odd metre to address the death of a king. The choice of metre is almost sufficient proof in and of itself that Erasmus did not intend this poem to be taken as an epitaph (in which case the author of the title, in full or in part, is presumably not Erasmus). Erasmus used the metre in at least ten other poems which reached print.³³ As in the poem above, these consistently (with the sole exception of 59.2) have a ‘spondaic base’ to the line, i.e. the first two syllables are guaranteed to be long.

V. The ‘Epitaph’ on Henry VII: historical context

The most obvious question to ask about the epitaph on Henry VII is why it was omitted from that printed collection of Erasmus’s verse into which it was subsequently copied. The collection is full of similarly occasional pieces, a dozen or more epitaphs on figures of varying eminence, some trivial and some, like this, reflecting on major public events, such as

³¹ The tense of *cuperet* in line 3 suggests that both *luxit* and *est repertus* in line 2 are of the preterite rather than the true perfect tense.

³² The *olim*, in context, is probably to be taken of an indefinite future time (this is found elsewhere in Erasmus, e.g. Poem 49); the adverb *septimum*, punning upon Henry’s ordinal number, could also be taken in apposition with *illum*, i.e. ‘[Henry the] seventh’; the choice of number may also be inspired by Matt. 18:22.

³³ See M-V 5, 30, 35, 47, 54, 57, 59, 60, 78, 97; hendecasyllabic lines are also used (amidst other metres) at 130.14-19, 123.17-20 and 133.7-8.

the return of Philip the Fair to the Netherlands around New Year 1504, or his lines in celebration of Henry VIII's victory at the Battle of the Spurs in 1513.³⁴ Thus his lengthy poem 'Prosopopoeia Britanniae', written in haste and embarrassment after his visit to Henry VII's children at Eltham in 1499, not only lavishes praise on Henry VII but also dutifully extols the union of the red rose and the white represented by the royal family.³⁵ Erasmus was sufficiently vain and careful not to have mislaid an epitaph on a king, and if it was available to a random copyist in England in the 1520s, it was probably available to its own author in 1518. Its omission from the published edition is therefore more likely to have been an active editorial decision than an accident.

The reason for exclusion is not hard to seek. Erasmus's verse was hardly an epitaph in the classical sense, certainly not the sort of thing to put on a king's tomb. Nor indeed was it the sort of thing to publish in print if one hoped for patronage and favour from the late king's son and heir. 'Why is it that no Englishman mourned your death, Henry?', the poet asks, 'And why was no one to be found anywhere who wanted you to sail back?' It is not flattery, and sums up what many felt about Henry VII's death, but what most sublimated instead into inordinate praise for his successor. The Spanish ambassador commented at the time that few people were shedding tears for the late king.³⁶ Much of the rejoicing that greeted Henry VIII's accession was barely veiled condemnation of Henry VII – but it was decently veiled. The lines that follow this chilly opening in fact do much to mitigate the apparent censure. They explain that an unruly flock which hates the smack of firm discipline never laments the departure of the dutiful teacher who inflicts it, but rather prays that he will never return. This move starts to shift the censure from the sovereign to his subjects, but it nevertheless testifies to a disturbing lack of popular love and favour. The discussion of firm discipline may well allude to the increasingly arbitrary bonds and penalties that Henry, through such agents as Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, had loaded onto his nobility and gentry in an endeavour to ensure order and obedience. Some modern historians have even suggested that Henry's exploitative and oppressive policy had gone so far that, by the time he died, he had

³⁴ Reedijk, nos. 78, pp. 272-77; and 93, pp. 303-4.

³⁵ Reedijk, no. 45, pp. 248-53. M-V 4, pp. 30-41, at p. 32

³⁶ David Starkey, *Henry: Virtuous Prince* (London: Harper, 2008), p. 264.

driven England's elite almost to breaking point.³⁷ Certainly the accession of Henry VIII was greeted as offering the prospect of real relief from the policy of the previous regime.³⁸

Although the poem as a whole vindicates Henry VII against his ingrate subjects, it is nevertheless the likeliest explanation of its omission from the 1518 *Epigrammata* that Erasmus was nervous of how its opening might be interpreted. He would have remembered only too well how, when the French humanist poet Robert Gaguin had aired some unfavourable impressions of Henry after his visit to England on diplomatic business in 1489, the poets of Henry's Court had responded fiercely.³⁹

Interestingly, the *Epigrammata* furnishes us with another case of editorial omission by Erasmus, albeit of a different kind. The 'Prosopopoeia Britanniae' was originally accompanied by a shorter poem in praise of John Skelton, which survives in only one manuscript, Egerton 1651, which Allen reckoned a presentation copy of a group of verses made for Prince Henry shortly after Erasmus's visit to Eltham. Skelton was at that time tutor to Henry, and was mentioned by name in the original 'Prosopopoeia'. But in all printed copies of that poem, Erasmus altered the line to eliminate Skelton's name, and he never included the poem specifically addressed to Skelton in anything he published. Reedijk conjectures that this was because 'their acquaintance never grew into a friendship'.⁴⁰ It certainly shows that, in publishing his verse, Erasmus did not simply 'chuck in the kitchen sink', but exercised a degree of discrimination.

Erasmus himself never voiced anything but admiration for Henry VII. The poem on Britain that he wrote during his visit in 1499 sings his praises as 'for me the finest part of this fine kingdom' and 'the unique wonder of this age'.⁴¹ One might take this with a pinch of salt:

³⁷ Christine Carpenter, 'Henry VII and the English Polity', in B. J. Thompson (ed.), *The Reign of Henry VII* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 11-30, at p. 26.

³⁸ Starkey, *Henry: Virtuous Prince*, pp. 261-65. See S. J. Gunn, 'The Accession of Henry VIII', *Historical Research* 64 (1991), pp. 278-88, esp. 285-86, for the immediate reaction against the regime of the late king. See also Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p. 315.

³⁹ David R. Carlson, 'Politicizing Tudor Court Literature: Gaguin's Embassy and Henry VII's Humanists' Response', *Studies in Philology* 85 (1988), pp. 279-304.

⁴⁰ Reedijk, p. 253.

⁴¹ Reedijk, no. 45, pp. 248-53, at p. 249, ll. 29-20. M-V 4, pp. 30-41, at p. 32.

he was writing for the king's younger son. But many years later Erasmus was reminded once more of those days, in penning the dedication for the edition of Livy that Froben published at Basel in 1531. For he dedicated the edition to Charles Blount (1516-44), son of the Lord Mountjoy (ca. 1478-1534) who had urged him to head for England back in 1509. In emphasising the importance of the study of history, Erasmus told Charles that his father, William, had studied alongside Henry VIII (then Prince of Wales) when he was a boy, and that their studies had focussed in particular on history, 'with the enthusiastic approval of Henry VII, that king of singular judgement and prudence'.⁴² There was no reason for Erasmus to speak quite so warmly of a long-dead sovereign other than to express a sincere opinion. (An incautious reader might infer a veiled criticism of Henry VIII here, given that by 1531 Henry's infatuation with Anne Boleyn was notorious, and would soon lead him to abandon Catherine of Aragon, the aunt of Emperor Charles V, dismissing her definitively from his presence and his household. But Erasmus was not the man to voice veiled criticism of living princes from whom he might yet expect a pension or a promotion.)

There is, then, a double edge to Erasmus's poem. It seems to start as a censure of the dead king. The obvious answer to his opening questions would be precisely what so many of Henry's own subjects seem to have thought – that he had been an exacting and overbearing prince, extorting obedience and revenue from a surly populace. But the satire takes an unexpected turn as it deflects the criticism from prince to people. Their sullen satisfaction in his death becomes the index of an untoward and unruly disposition that promises trouble for the future. There will therefore come a time, he foretells, when they will want Henry back after all, and will petition the heavens for his return with repeated prayers. Here too, perhaps, is a clue to the editor's decision. The thrust of the poem is to blame the people, not the king, for the strange lack of mourning at his passing. But that final sally, the warning that one day they would find they missed him, could also be interpreted, or misinterpreted, as some kind of censure upon his successor. Why, after all, should they ever yearn for Henry VII if they were perfectly content under Henry VIII? For the reasons already set out, that is very unlikely to have been Erasmus's meaning. But, irrespective of intention, such a remark could very

⁴² *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P. S. Allen (12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906-58), vol. IX, ep. 2435, to Charles Blount, 1 March 1531, pp. 143-45, at p. 145: 'idque vehementer approbante patre, Henrico Septimo, singulari iudicio prudentiaque Rege'. This is Erasmus's only reference to Henry VII in the entire corpus of his correspondence.

easily be taken amiss. The risk of being taken as censuring either Henry VII or, even worse, his successor, would give Erasmus plenty of reason to keep this particular poem out of his ‘complete verse’. When Germanus Brixius decided to make a public attack on Thomas More’s *Epigrammata*, among the many charges he brought was that More had sullied Henry VII’s reputation in seeking to advance Henry VIII’s.⁴³ It may be that Erasmus omitted his own epitaph on Henry VII in anticipation of just such a reaction.

It is not possible to be certain when this ‘epitaph’ was written, though the likeliest time is soon after his arrival in England in the summer of 1509. Erasmus was at Rome when Henry VII died, but one of his oldest English friends, William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, wrote him an elegant and encouraging letter about a month later, extolling the generosity and learning of Henry VIII and urging Erasmus to head for England, fame, and fortune.⁴⁴ Mountjoy was doing well under the new regime. As a boyhood companion of the new king, he was among those who were ‘very generously rewarded with grants of office’ early in the new reign.⁴⁵ After some hesitation, Erasmus accepted the invitation, and spent most of the next two years in England. Sadly, this is one of the most thinly documented periods of his life. The great Erasmian scholar P. S. Allen comments on ‘the remarkable absence of all trace of Erasmus between his journey back from Italy in 1509’ and his departure for a brief trip to Paris in April 1511. Erasmus lodged at various times with Mountjoy, with Andrea Ammonio (a papal official resident in London, and at times the king’s Latin secretary), and most of all with

⁴³ ‘The *Antimorus* of Germanus Brixius of Auxerre’, ed. Daniel Kinney, in Thomas More, *Latin Poems*, ed. Clarence H. Miller et al., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, vol. 3, part II), pp. 467-547, at pp. 492-95. For further analysis of this episode, See Marc Laureys, ‘Invektive und Poetik in Germain de Bries *Antimorus*’, in *Norm and Poesie: zur expliziten und impliziten Poetik in der lateinischen Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Beate Hintze & Roswitha Simons (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013. Frühe Neuzeit 178), pp. 145-62, esp. pp. 147 and 158.

⁴⁴ *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P. S. Allen (12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906-58), vol. I, ep. 215, from William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, Greenwich, 27 May 1509, pp. 449-52. On Mountjoy’s invitation to Erasmus, see Starkey, *Henry: Virtuous Prince*, pp. 282-85.

⁴⁵ Gunn, ‘Accession of Henry VIII’, p. 283.

Thomas More in his home at Bucklersbury.⁴⁶ The satirical edge to the epitaph on Henry VII does tempt one to see it as another product of that creative partnership with More which produced their collaborative translations of Lucian and planted the seeds of both the *Encomium Moriae* and *Utopia*.

VI. Provenance and handwriting

Unfortunately, the interpolated copy of Erasmus's epigrams offers us few clues as to its early history or ownership. The Tudor binding is blind-stamped using tools that were used by a London binder from the 1550s onwards, and it features the initials 'H. R.', presumably those of the binder himself.⁴⁷ Much later on, the book came to the Cambridge University Library as part of the donation from the royal collection bestowed upon the university by George I in 1715. The shelfmark on the title page, W.9.9, dates from its time in the royal collection. Like many of the books in that donation, it had previously formed part of the collection of John Moore, Bishop of Ely. Before him it had been in the hands of an obscure owner or collector by name John Chomeley, who seems to have acquired it in 1681.⁴⁸ Where it had been in the meantime, and where it had been between publication and the fitting of its present binding, are alike unknown. Most probably it was in and around London from the 1550s until its arrival in Cambridge in 1715. Given the London dominance of the book trade,

⁴⁶ *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi*, I, p. 455.

⁴⁷ The authors are grateful to Dr Emily Dourish, of the Rare Books Department of Cambridge University Library, for advice about the binding and provenance of this volume.

⁴⁸ His name and the date are at the top of the title page, apparently in place of an earlier, erased ownership mark. There are several candidates for John Chomeley (Cholmondely or Chomley). One was admitted as a pensioner of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, in May 1663, born at Mansfield as the son of John Chomeley, gent. He is probably not the same as the John Cholmeley admitted to the Middle Temple in Oct. 1662 as the son of John Cholmeley, esq., of Herefordshire. For these, see J. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (10 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922-54), I.i.334-35. Neither of these is to be confused with John Cholmley, MP for Southwark 1698-1711, born at Southwark in 1661, heir of a major brewing firm. The MP's death in 1711 makes him an unlikely candidate for the owner before Moore, who had probably acquired the book before then. For the MP, see <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/cholmley-john-1661-1711> [consulted on Tuesday 31 March 2015].

London is also the likeliest place for the book to have been from the 1520s to the 1550s, the period in which the extra verses were probably inserted. But it might equally well have belonged to some scholar of Oxford or Cambridge for a while before drifting back to London.

It is worth noting that at least one copy of the 1518 *Utopia* can be seen in the hands of a number of Cambridge scholars in the Tudor era. Geoffrey Blythe (d. 1542), Warden of King's Hall, owned 'eutopia thomae mori', valued at 8d. William Porter, a fellow of St John's College who died around Christmas 1545, owned 'eutopia mori cum alijs', valued at 8d. The 'cum alijs' ('with other things') in the valuer's description suggests at least that the edition was the one with the epigrams of More and Erasmus appended. It is an enticing thought that this may have been the very copy now shelved at Rel.c.51.3, with the other Froben volume bound in as well. The description would certainly fit, and the valuation would not be unreasonable. Almost identical entries appear in the later wills of Peter Williamson of Corpus Christi (who died over the winter of 1546-47) and Edmund Pierpoint, the Master of Jesus College who died late in 1556, as well as in the inventory of an unnamed scholar that was taken some time in the 1550s.⁴⁹ Books did pass from one owner to another in Tudor Cambridge, so these entries may all represent just one or two physical items.

The nature of the handwriting of the added poems suggests that they were copied in by an early sixteenth-century owner. However, attempts to identify the writer have so far proved fruitless. Thus, the hand is not that of Thomas More, nor that of Stephen Gardiner, John Longland, Thomas Lupset, Richard Pace, Richard Sampson, John Stokesley, Cuthbert Tunstall, or Peter Vannes. But the field is a wide one, and it would require good fortune to find the copyist.

Conclusion

It is not every day that poems are rediscovered. This chance find, squeezed long ago into the margins of someone's copy of a fashionable author's verse, emphasises the importance of

⁴⁹ E. Leedham-Green, *Books in Cambridge Inventories* (2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. II, pp. 26, 59, 91, 166, and 200. Pierpoint's copy was valued at 14d, and the anonymous owner's at 10d. William Johnson, of St John's, owned 'de statu reipublicae', valued at 8d in 1559 (p. 230); and Edmund Aulaby owned a copy valued at 8d that same year (pp. 244-45). There are several other copies of *Utopia* recorded in inventories at varying prices in Elizabeth's reign.

marginalia in early printed books, and perhaps disturbs us also with its reminder of how easily creative work is missed or lost. The half-jokey, half-serious tone of Erasmus's mock epitaph on King Henry VII is not only an intriguing sidelight on a resonant moment in English history but also, in this quincentenary year of Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum* and More's *Utopia*, a timely memorial of a great friendship and of a marriage of minds in early Tudor England that engendered some of the wisest and wittiest writing of its age.

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